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ABSTRACT

The needs hierarchy developed by Abraham Maslow lends itself to the composition classroom. The hierarchy depicts five distinct need levels through which an individual travels: basic, safety/security, belonging/peer acceptance, ego/esteem, and self-actualization. From teacher observations and students' comments, need levels can be assessed and appropriate writing assignments given. Students on the safety level require definite structure and immediate reinforcement: the scope and expectations of writing assignments should be realistic and clear with the teacher working closely with the students through the prewriting, writing, and revision stages of composition. Students on the belonging level need group acceptance and should be allowed to work together on writing projects whenever possible. Students on the ego level need recognition and rewards: consequently, the teacher should make their writing assignments challenging. The audience for writing can be more remote and the purpose for writing more abstract. Writing for students on the self-actualization level is a matter of personal involvement: it is self-initiated and the sense of discovery comes from within. These students should assume major roles in structuring their own writing tasks. (HOD)

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IF MASLOW CREATED A COMPOSITION COURSE

A NEW LOOK AT MOTIVATION IN THE CLASSROOM

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By

Beth Boone and Ada S. Hill

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A Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting
Of the Conference on English Education
And Secondary School English Conference
Omaha, Nebraska
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CS205774

Once upon a time in the land of Composition there dwelt a teacher, Ms. Geraldine Grimgrader. Grimgrader had an abundant supply of red pencils -- pencils in her pockets, in her buttonholes, pencils behind both ears and one extra-special red fineline marker tucked neatly in her topknot. She made assignments. She marked errors. She wrote comments like, "Get help. You need it!" and "Don't bother, it this is the best you can do," and "Did you get your little brother to write this?"

Geraldine's assignments looked something like this:

READ:

from At Melville's Tomb
Hart Crane

Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge
The dice of drowned men's bones he saw bequeath
An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,
Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.

And wrecks passed without sound of bells,
The calyx of death's bounty giving back
A scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph,
The portent wound in corridors of shells.

ASSIGNMENT:

Write a well-developed paragraph (include topic sentence, at least three supporting details, and a clincher sentence) that analyzes the essential relationship between the "dice of drowned men's bones" and the "livid hieroglyph."

Be sure to include at least seven of this week's vocabulary words, one compound-complex sentence and three transitional devices as shown in your Warriner's English Grammar and Composition.

Use only one side of your paper. Write in black or blue-black ink. You have thirty minutes to complete this assignment.

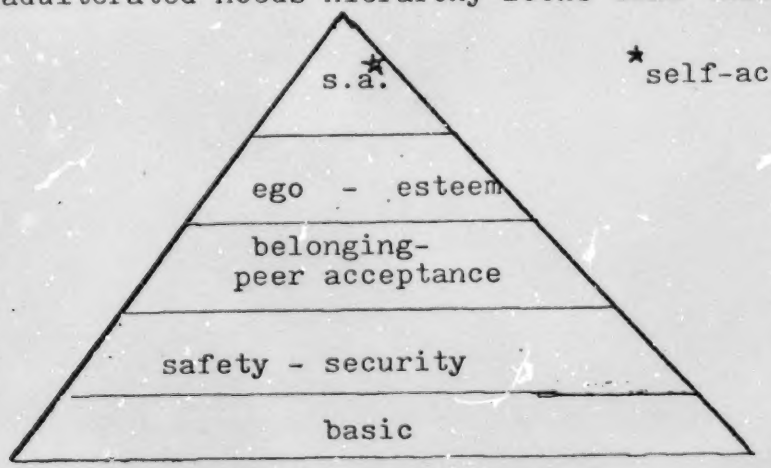
As you might imagine, most of Ms. Grimgrader's students failed.

Many never turned in their assignments and she, alas, was often heard mumbling and muttering -- to herself and to anyone who would listen -- about her students' total lack of motivation.

Although Ms. Grimgrader is fictitious, she is a composite of every composition teacher's worst and least productive moments. In truth, what we really share is our quest for ways to make our students want to write and write well. How can we motivate a class of thirty with different needs, varying abilities, and diverse goals?

Recently, in an attempt to find an answer, we turned to the writings of Abraham Maslow. Maslow, you may recall, was the humanist psychologist perhaps best known more than a decade ago for his ideas on creativity, cognition, the hierarchy of needs, and his theories on motivation. Since the needs hierarchy had been used with some success in business and industry as employers sought ways to motivate their employees to higher levels of performance, we made the necessary leap of logic and asked, "Why won't something similar work with our students in the composition classroom?"

The unadulterated needs hierarchy looks like this:



★self-actualization

The triangular model depicts five relatively distinct "need" levels through which an individual travels. Theoretically, one does not move to a higher motivational need level until the needs of the lower level have been met. An individual attempts to climb from one rung to the next only after both feet are firmly planted on the lower rung. For example, an individual whose basic needs -- for food, shelter, clothing, air -- have not been met will not be concerned about his lack of security, his membership in a supportive, caring group, or his opportunities to excel. Certainly, he will not leap into creative and unknown territory.

If basic needs are met, we crave security. Safety and security are assured by dollars on the job, perhaps by stability in a marriage. Once we feel safe, we seem to need acceptance, and love from a larger sphere. We need to belong. Unions fill this need in the market place; clubs, fraternities, and coffee klatches do likewise after hours.

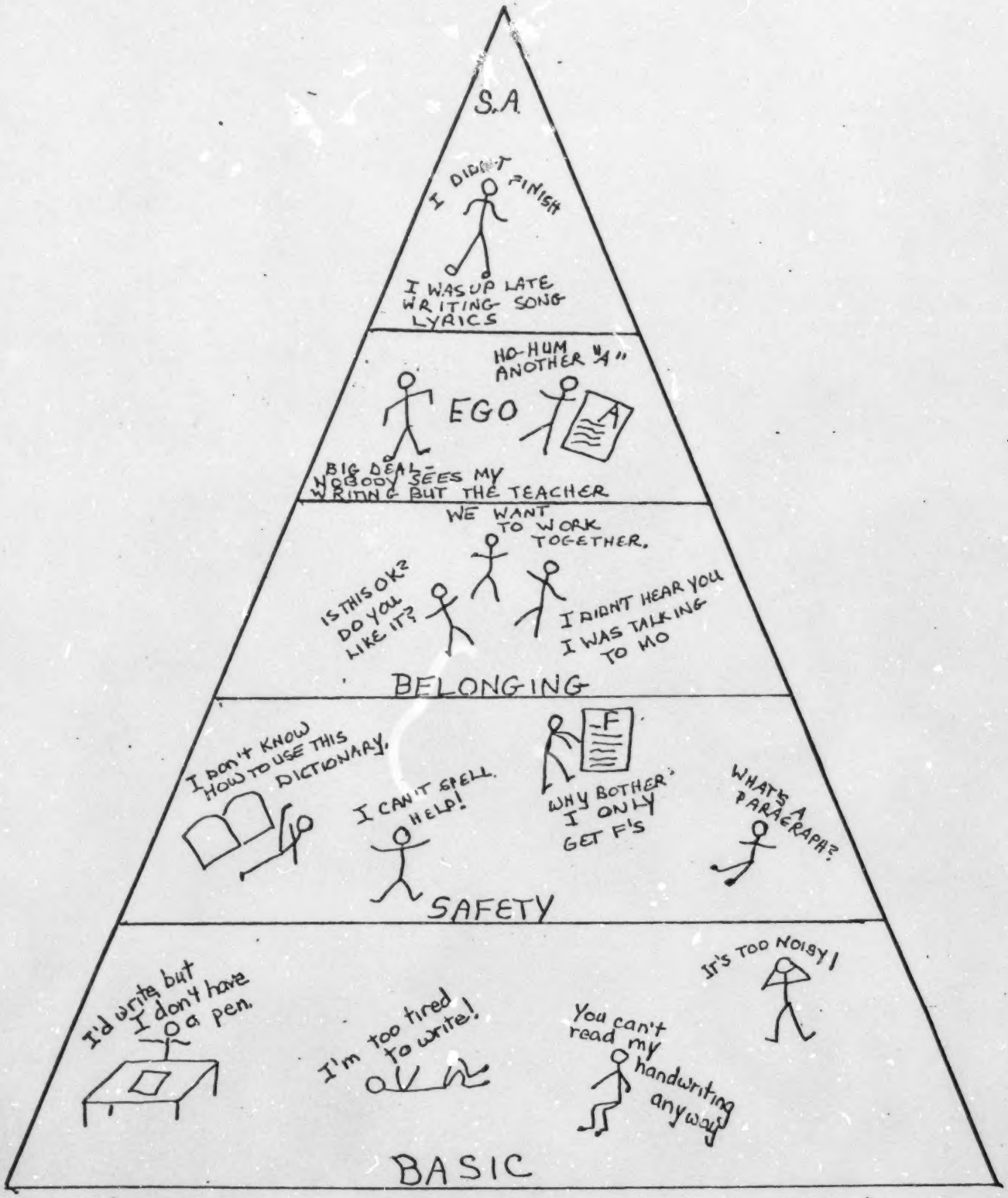
With the three lower need levels met, the individual wants to shine. As an artist, he needs to sell the painting or receive an award. If he is an employee, he wants the promotion, and if he is an author, he needs to be published. Whatever his role in life, the person who is motivated by his need for esteem, strives for the exceptional reward.

Given security, acceptance and recognition, the individual is then free to self-actualize; he can begin to perform a task for no other reason than that the task has its own intrinsic worth. The person who is, for the moment, self-actualizing is lost in his work or his art, unconscious of time, uncaring about payment, unconcerned with external reward.

Additionally, Maslow believed that human beings who are self-actualizing and thereby self-motivating tend to lift the level of those around them. As an aside, we might note that the best we, as teachers, can do for our students is be at a high need level ourselves. We might, in fact, cause a kind of motivation contagion -- a veritable epidemic of motivated people.

Most important, at least to the premise of this article, is Maslow's message that people who assume positions of authority and/or control can not directly motivate others. The best that a teacher or a supervisor, for example, can do is learn to recognize his students or his employees needs and goals and then attempt to provide the desired goals or, at least, a pathway to those goals.

The adapted triangular model shows the kinds of needs that composition students at each level might have.


S.A.
I DIDN'T FINISH
I WAS UP LATE WRITING SONG LYRICS
EGO
HO-HUM ANOTHER "A"
A
BIG DEAL- NOBODY SEES MY WRITING BUT THE TEACHER
BELONGING
WE WANT TO WORK TOGETHER.
IS THIS OK? DO YOU LIKE IT?
I DIDN'T HEAR YOU I WAS TALKING TO MO
SAFETY
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO USE THIS DICTIONARY.
I CAN'T SPELL. HELP!
F
WHY BOTHER? I ONLY GET F'S
WHAT'S A PARAGRAPH?
BASIC
I'd write but I don't have a pen.
I'm too tired to write!
You can't read my handwriting anyway
IT'S TOO NOISY!

If Ms. Grimgrader, who failed to teach her students not to fail resigned and if we entered her classroom, and asked her students to write freely about anything, we might leave with the following notes based on their performance that day and on comments found in Grimgrader's grade book. Grouped by need level, the notes might be:

BASIC

John and Joe arrived late.
John had no paper. Joe had no pen. Someone lent him one, but the sentence he finally produced was a seemingly cryptic message.
Marvel practiced "free sleeping."
Stanley labored throughout the period. He wrote one precisely and perfectly lettered sentence. (His writing folder contained no evidence of any writing.)

SAFETY

Mary, Marie, and Bill ripped up paper. Quick starts and quick throw-aways were followed by a flood of questions.
"Does it have to have a title?"
"How do you spell ...?"
"Will you help me start?"
"Do I skip a space between paragraphs?"
Actually, our names were called a total of thirty-seven times in the short space of one fifty minute class period. Their folders show consistent failure.

BELONGING

Sally, Sandy, Slick, and Bo were friendly and chatty. They did not hear the instructions. Following a second explanation, they begin -- after they consulted each other. (A note in the grade book suggests that they frequently cheat. Their ideas are always alike and they are frequently presented in essentially the same way.)
Halfway through the class period these students asked for permission to work on a group story.

ESTEEM

Robert and Susan seemed grade conscious and competitive. They both want to go to good colleges. A scheduling difficulty kept them out of Ms. R's honors class. They complained that the work is usually too easy and very boring. Susan asked for a pass to see her drama teacher. Robert wanted to see the coach about Friday's game plan. Both are "stars" in other areas. They promised to write at home.

SA

Antoinette was the class enigma. She daydreamed and doodled. She asked for permission to do her writing in her journal; a well-worn book that seemed to overflow with poetry, stories and comments about her world. She confessed she was tired because she worked late on a new poem. (Her writing folder

contained little except this note: "A. is uncooperative and will not follow directions. She still won't write a good two paragraph composition. Possible failure.")

Obviously, no student is as perfect a candidate for need level typing as the students in Grimgrader's class. Most students, though, when questionned or observed do seem to operate from a general need area. We have experimented with a number of need level assessment tools. Each teacher should use the method or combination of methods with which he or she is most comfortable. Perhaps, there are new methods to be invented. Whatever the method, Maslow's suggestion for the composition teacher as he begins a new class might be something like this: look and listen -- identify your students' needs and goals.

An insightful teacher's observations are one of the best, most accurate, and least complicated ways to determine student need levels in the classroom. A student's comments and behavior from the moment that writing is assigned to the moment that he receives his evaluation are usually clear-cut indicators of his needs.

We have also used open-ended sentence questionnaires that contain items like:

I feel best about writing for a teacher who_____.
When I receive a composition that has been graded and written on by my teacher, I feel_____.
I'd like to write more if _____.
My writing would improve if _____.
The most helpful thing that a writing teacher can do as I write is _____.

Students are both willing and eager to complete the sentences. The lessons learned about how to teach, when to teach, and how to evaluate are more valuable than those taught in teacher books or

methods courses.

Maslow believed that it was easiest to assess an individual's need level by listening to his gripes. He referred to low-grumbles, high grumbles, and metagrumbles. Low grumbles are spouted by one who is motivated by basic and safety needs. Metagrumbles ("If they'd just let me work as long as I want. Why should I quit just because a bell rings?") are uttered by self-actualizing people. High grumbles indicate strong belonging and ego/esteem needs.

The response matrix that follows was designed with that in mind. A combined twenty-odd years in classrooms provided the gripes; their placement on the matrix is the result of intuition, judgment, and trial and error. The matrix is by no means perfect, yet it has proven valuable as an assessment tool.

DIRECTIONS FOR USE:

Students are instructed to place a large "x" over the five gripes that most closely express their own silent or spoken complaints about school related writing.

SCORING:

The diagonal row of boxes from the upper left corner to the lower right corner (numbers 1, 7, 13, 19, and 25) are responses that indicate a strong need for belonging, sharing, and support.

The triangle to the left contains both basic and security level need-generated gripes. The triangle on the right of the diagonal has complaints vocalized as a result of the need for ego reward and the need to self-actualize.

(Additional matrices have been developed as well. One is based on a student's preferred writing assignments. The other makes use of the reasons a student may choose to write at all, e.g. to relate a message, to express personal feelings, to describe an accident, or to share an idea. Both matrices are available upon request.)

Response Matrix: Writing Gripes

1 If I'm going to write, it has to be something that will get read, like a letter or a note. It's dumb to write only for school work. I want responses to my writing.	2 Writing makes me feel bad. I put lots of work into a paper, and the teacher takes out a red pen and ruins it.	3 I wouldn't mind writing if the teacher would let me write about the things I want to write about.	4 It's dumb to write for a class assignment. If I were writing for a newspaper or a magazine, it would be better.	5 Why should I write only what my teacher tells me to write? I want to create a written work, maybe a poem or a story.
6 I never have paper or a pen when I need it. If my teacher wants me to write, s/he should give me the materials I need.	7 If we could work in groups and work together, I'd like to write more. I don't like to sit by myself and write.	8 The thing that makes me mad is that I have to write and no one sees it except my teacher. I want other people to see what I can do.	9 I like to write when the choice is mine, but I hate to write at school, or on school assignments.	10 I like to write. In fact, I get so involved that I'm lost in my writing. The problem is that I'm not allowed to get that "involved" at school. Everything at school depends on schedules & bells.
11 I don't like to write because no one will help me get started or help me later when I need it.	12 How can anyone be expected to write in a classroom? It's dirty and crowded. If a teacher wants me to write, the room will have to be clean and comfortable.	13 Writing for a teacher is stupid. I think we should be able to share our ideas and writing with friends and classmates.	14 I'd write more, but no one appreciates it. I'd rather spend time doing something worth my time.	15 This class is bad because the teacher is so unfair. She only accepts writing that she likes and agrees with. She isn't open to what I like, or think or care about.
16 The teacher says I can use a dictionary or grammar book. It takes too long to find the right word or page and even then I'm still not sure if I'm right or wrong.	17 I can't spell or punctuate, so, it would be better if I just used a grammar book and did all the exercises. After that, I could write.	18 The teacher always wants me to use a dictionary. If I had one, I'd use it. Why don't they have enough here in the classroom	19 I don't like to sit by myself and just write. I'd rather be with a group of people.	20 Writing is useless. Everyone thinks so. I'd rather spend my time playing a sport or something else where people really notice me.
21 How can I write a paragraph if I don't know what to do. If a teacher wants me to write, she should show me how.	22 The teachers always say they can't read my handwriting. It is silly to write if no one will even try to read it.	23 I could write it I knew what the teacher wanted. I hate it when they say, "Write a composition about anything you want to write about."	24 I can't write because I'm always too hungry or tired.	25 I get really mad if I have to be quiet. How can I write if I can't share ideas with a friend first?

Response Matrix: Reasons to Write

1 write letters to my family or friends to tell them what is happening to me.	2 write my own announcements and advertisements.	3 write reports about something that has just happened.	4 discover what I really think about something.	5 find inner happiness expressing my thoughts.
6 write an account of something that has happened to me.	7 give advice to other people.	8 write formal letters that relay information.	9 show others how I see my world and what's happening in it.	10 discover new ways to say what I feel.
11 describe to someone else how something happened, such as an accident.	12 summarize what I read.	13 write an article or news story about an event that takes place.	14 figure out why something is the way it is or why a certain event happened.	15 record the research I've done and the conclusions I have reached.
16 keep a record of what happens to me, like a diary or journal.	17 take a message for other people.	18 put what someone else says into my own words.	19 write letters to complain about something. For example, a complaint to a principal, a mayor, or a company.	20 convince other people that I am right about something.
21 fill out forms.	22 show someone, perhaps a teacher, that I have learned something.	23 give directions to someone on how to get from one place to another.	24 write about my feelings. when I'm depressed, or angry, or sad.	25 explain to someone how something works.

Response Matrix: Preferred Writing Assignments

1 a memo to my teacher about the way s/he grades on a form for memos.	2 A group story. I could work with three or four other people in my class.	3 a speech I could give to the school about a change we need.	4 a letter to someone who will write one back to me.	5 an article for the school newspaper with my by-line (name) on it.
6 a letter to the principal that tells him or her the worst thing about our school.	7 a group evaluation of the school, or the teacher, or the class. We'd talk together and then write the evaluation.	8 anything, as long as it's my idea.	9 a composition about some part of my life that I would like to share with other people. For example, what I do with my free time or something funny about my childhood.	10 a poem about my feelings that I'd share only if I wanted to, not because it had to be graded.
11 a note to a friend that has done something I like (or dislike) very much. I might not want to give it to the friend though.	12 my ideas and thoughts and theories. They might make me famous one day, but I don't need to share them now.	13 a story that I like and enjoy writing. It might be unusual or even an anti-story. It wouldn't have to have all of the short story elements that teachers and handbooks suggest.	14 a plan for a change to be made in school. But first, I'd want to discuss it with other classmates later we could proof-read our writing together.	15 an essay to enter in a contest. Winners get prizes.
16 a personal data sheet that I can use if I'm job hunting.	17 a paragraph(or more) about something funny at my school, like the cafeteria at lunchtime or my craziest class. The teacher would help me if I need it.	18 a story or poem, or essay for the school literary magazine.	19 anything, as long as the teacher does not try to tell me how to do it.	20 an article about school news that would be printed in my city newspaper's youth section.

No matter how we assess our students' needs, eventually we must decide how we can most effectively work with students at each level, And so we ask, if Maslow created a composition course: How would he make assignments?

Which assignments work with which students?

How would students at each level be asked to write?

How much help would the teacher give?

Finally, what kinds of evaluations would aid in the ideal growth of a student who will hopefully progress from one motivational need level to the next?

The assignments we developed were based on several assumptions. As a result of personal observations, we concluded that most high school students would be on the belonging level and that very few would be on the self-actualized level. Likewise, if the students' basic needs for such things as food and clothing were not met by the home or an outside agency, very little, if any, learning could take place. Therefore, we began structuring assignments for students on the safety level, correlating motivational needs levels with basic skill development.

Students on the safety level require definite structure and immediate reinforcement. These are, of course, augmented by a safe classroom environment and a regular schedule of activities. The scope and expectations of writing assignments for safety-level students should be both realistic and clear. In addition, the students' audience should be close to them; their subject, fairly close; and their purpose, practical.

The following is an example of a writing assignment for safety-level students who have studied Robert Frost's poem "The Death of

the Hired Man":

> Pretend that you are either Mary or Warren. You need to write a friendly letter to Harold Wilson, who is away at college, to tell him that Silas is dead. Feel free to invent any details which would help your letter sound as if it were really from Mary or Warren.
> Remember that you will want to break the sad news to Harold gently, because you know that he liked Silas. In addition, you will want to ask him about college and to tell him about what has been happening on the farm.

The teacher is responsible for working closely with the safety-level students through the prewriting, writing, and revision stages of the composition process. The teacher not only helps the safety-level students with the expression of their ideas, but also supplies constant support so that the students develop confidence in their abilities to compose. The students are graded immediately for the effort that they put into the assignment. This could be done by marking only certain errors on specific assignments or commenting on the positive aspects of the papers while using grammar drills to remediate identifiable weaknesses. The teacher could also use incremental grading, in which, for example, the student could receive 50 points for the process itself, another 25 for following the directions, and additional points for mechanical and grammatical skills which have been recently taught.

Students on the belonging level have had their security needs met and now long for group acceptance. These children are reaching out to their peers to fulfill their needs for human relationships and love. Students on this level should be allowed to work together on writing projects whenever possible. Rather than try to circumvent the students' need for belonging to a group, teachers should use it to facilitate their acquisition of writing skills.

An example of an assignment based upon "The Death of the Hired

Man" which attempts to channel this group awareness productively follows:

> The members of your group of students are producing a small community newspaper. The big news in town is that Silas has returned and died. After your group has named your paper, each reporter should select one of the following articles to write for the next issue:
>
> a. A front-page news article about Silas's death
> b. Silas's obituary
> c. A personal column by Harold Wilson entitled: What I Remember of Silas
> d. A letter to the editor from Warren, complaining that the county does not have a public home for the aged
> e. A letter to "Dear Abby" from Mary, asking for suggestions on how to get Warren to understand why Silas returned. This should also have a reply from Abby.
> f. An editorial praising Mary and Warren for taking in Silas.
>
> You may want to add other staff assignments or change these slightly. You will also need to invent some facts for your articles.
> After the articles are written, all the members of the group should work together to edit and prepare the copy. You will need to make group decisions about where each article will go and how it will be arranged on a page.

Since most of the students in a high school classroom are probably on this level, several groups of five or six students of varying abilities could be formed. The teacher's responsibility includes walking around the room to insure that the work is divided equally and that the groups function efficiently. In addition, the teacher should be readily available to act as a resource person.

Grading of the newspapers can be handled in a variety of ways. Each member of the group could receive the grade that the newspaper itself earns, or the members themselves could evaluate each other's contributions to the production. Another possibility would be to combine both suggestions, giving each student two grades on the project.

Students on the ego level have replaced a desire for group interaction with a need for recognition and rewards. Scholastically, these are usually obtained through good grades. In order to meet the needs of students on the ego level, the teacher must make the writing assignments challenging and the rewards appropriate to the accomplishment. The students' audience can be more remote and the purpose, more abstract than they were for the students on the lower needs levels.

With the same poem as the basis, the following writing assignment is geared toward meeting the needs of the ego-level student:

> Imagine that you are the mayor of the town and that you have to give a speech tomorrow evening to a local civic group. It can be the Woman's Club, the Lion's Club, or another with which you are familiar. You want to talk about honor and dignity, and you think that Silas would be a good example.
> Write a 15-minute speech, giving the members of the civic group examples of how Silas was an honorable man. You also want the people in the club to learn something from Silas's story that they can apply to their own lives.

After making sure that each student understands what the assignment entails, the teacher expects the students on the ego level to work independently on the writing task. The teacher, however, is available for assistance throughout the prewriting, writing, and rewriting stages for any student requesting assistance. The ego-level students' papers are marked carefully for mechanics, style, organization, content, and effectiveness. These students are competing among their peers for ranking for grades. Group and effort-based grades have little value to them. The teacher, of course, should follow the exercise with personal conferences to help the students understand their mistakes so that they can improve on the next writing task. The teacher should give public recognition to

the best papers in the class by posting them on the board, reading them aloud, or encouraging the students to submit their papers to the school's literary magazine or other local publications.

Students on the self-actualization level in writing are very rare. Writing for these students is a matter of personal involvement. It is self-initiated and the sense of discovery comes from within. Teachers of self-actualizing students should provide guidance in the writing assignment, while allowing the students to assume the major roles in structuring their own writing tasks.

An example of a writing assignment for a student on the self-actualized level who has read "The Death of the Hired Man" follows:

> Think about the poem and decide upon an aspect of it that is particularly meaningful to you. It may be one of the following lines:
>
> I know just how it feels
> To think of the right thing to say too late.
>
> Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
> They have to take you in.
>
> Illustrate the ideas you see developing from the poem in an essay, short story, or poem of you own.

The teacher of a self-actualized student allows him to work independently, supplying assistance only upon request. The self-actualized student is the best evaluator of his own work for only he knows whether it meets his original purpose or accomplishes what he intended. The student should feel free to share his product with a person whom he respects, and the teacher should grade him on the apparent effort that he put into the writing assignment. This obviously can only be accomplished when a good rapport exists between the teacher and the self-actualized student.

What we have presented as a hybrid of Maslow's motivational

theories and the teaching of writing is really nothing new. Educational journals abound with advice on how to make assignments, how to instruct, and how to evaluate. Often one piece of advice, however, seems to conflict with another. Maslow's needs hierarchy is the perfect vehicle for discriminately blending the various trends in methodology with recent research about the teaching of writing. In addition, the needs hierarchy applied to the composition classroom confirms that all of the assignment ideas, all of the instructional methods, and most evaluative techniques have genuine merit if they are used with the <u>right</u> student.